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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000129

SIPDIS

DHAHRAN SENDS,
PASS TO NEA/ARP JOSHUA HARRIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/18/2019
TAGS: PGOV PINR PREL PTER
SUBJECT: INFLUENTIAL SAUDI PRINCE SPEAKS CANDIDLY ABOUT GAZA

Classified By: CG Joseph Kenny for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

(C) Key Points

-- HRH Prince Mishari bin Saud Al Saud told the Consul General that) whether true or not - Arabs view the U.S. as being responsible for the Israeli war in Gaza. He prefaced this comment by stating his displeasure of Hamas.

-- Prince Mishari also said that this war will only ingrain a deep-seated and lasting hatred among the surviving children of Gaza, which he believes is not in the best interest of Israel or the United States.

-- With respect to the incoming administration of President-elect Obama, Prince Mishari communicated a sense of tempered optimism for a new U.S. role in the Middle East that was not focused so heavily on terrorism.

(C) Comment

-- Prince Mishari's comments reflect a broader consensus among the elite, well-educated classes of Saudi Arabia. Though they overtly demonstrate little sympathy for Hamas, they believe that the average Arab only sees the innocent Palestinian bloodshed. Therefore, in their minds, the Israeli offensive in Gaza can never be justified and its ally, the U.S., will ultimately shoulder the blame for this perceived injustice.

End key points and comment.

¶1. (C) HRH Prince Mishari bin Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, deputy commander of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) in the Eastern Province (EP), met with Consul General (CG) Kenny at the Consulate in Dhahran on Sunday, January 18. PolOff and RSO were also present. The Prince is the second ranking royal family member in the EP, after the Emir Prince Mohammed bin Fahd. Also, as head of SANG in the EP and a son of the late King Saud, he has the ear and support of King Abdullah and is very close to Crown Prince Sultan.

¶2. (C) Prince Mishari spoke at length on Gaza and told the CG, "I am speaking to you as a friend, not as an official." He began his commentary by acknowledging the problematic nature of Hamas, but then quickly went into a criticism of the Israeli offensive. In his view, the Arab world only sees women and children being killed by the hundreds. He gestured toward the CG with his hand and said that he knows "Americans like you" don't agree with this war, but nevertheless the average Arab will blame the U.S.

¶3. (C) The influential prince warned of the consequences that

these "three weeks of war" will have on the psyche of Gazan children. He believes it will instill "hatred" among the children as they will always remember the death and perceived injustice of this war. Finally, he stated that regardless of whether it is warranted or not, the U.S. will be blamed just as severely as Israel. In the Prince's opinion, the Gaza war is detrimental to the U.S.'s national interest.

¶4. (C) Prince Mishari also congratulated the United States on the incoming administration of President-elect Obama. He said that he was optimistic that Obama would provide a new perspective on U.S. policy in the Middle East, a not-so-subtle reference to the U.S. stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He also said that President Bush understandably focused almost exclusively on terrorism during his tenure, but believed that it was time for the U.S. to shift focus.

(Approved: JKenny)
FRAKER